## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## 

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## FEDERAL RESEARCHERS TAKE RARE SHARK NAMED "COW"

A one-ton fish with the unlikely name of "cow shark" has been landed off the Mississippi delta by the Fish and Wildlife Service exploratory vessel Oregon, the Department of the Interior said today. The catch marks the first time a cow shark has been taken in the Gulf of Mexico, and the first one seen off North America in more than 75 years.

The 13-foot beast was picked up in shrimp trawl about 40 miles southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River at a depth of approximately 1,300 feet. Measurements and photographs were taken and these along with the shark's jaws and tail will be placed in the scientific collections at the National Museum in Washington, D. C. The shark's scientific name is <u>Hexanchus griseus</u>.

Most species of shark have five gill clefts on each side but this shark's scientific name <u>Hexanchus</u> literally means six-gilled. The presence of six gill openings on each side and the dissimilarity between its upper and lower teeth are identifying characteristics of this species. They are called cow sharks because they are large, slow moving, and not streamlined.

Cow sharks are known to eat small fish, squid, and other marine animals. They are not classed as maneaters.

The only other record of the occurrence of a cow shark on the east coast of continental North America was in 1886 near Currituck Lighthouse, North Carolina. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, this species of shark is probably more common than the records indicate, but it is not often seen or captured because it usually inhabits deeper waters.

Little is know about the occurrence and life of the cow shark in western hemisphere waters, the Department said, pointing out that considerable research is needed on this and many other deep-water species that inhabit the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico.

The new record was an "extra dividend" of exploratory trawls the Oregon has been making to determine if commercial quantities of royal red shrimp can be taken in the Gulf during all seasons of the year. The shrimp exploration thus far indicates that commercial quantities of these deepwater shrimp are present in the fall.

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